



You can do this.



October 5, 2003

Michigan news

[E-MAIL THIS STORY](#) | [PRINTER-FRIENDLY FORMAT](#)

[News links >](#)

[Today's stories](#)

[Metro](#)

[Wayne](#)

[Oakland](#)

[Macomb](#)

[Community Free](#)

[Press](#)

[Michigan](#)

[Nation/World](#)

[Education](#)

[Children First](#)

[Politics](#)

[Casinos](#)

[Health](#)

[Religion](#)

[Obituaries](#)

[Driving Today](#)

[AP wire](#)

[Desiree Cooper](#)

[Brian Dickerson](#)

[More columnists](#)

[Special projects](#)

[Quick links >](#)

Threats to lakes grow faster than cures

Group: Agencies must unify against invaders

September 22, 2003

BY HUGH MCDIARMID JR.

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

To the west, the Asian carp lurks in a canal near Chicago, 22 miles from a tenuous electrical barrier designed to keep the ravenous fish from swarming into the Great Lakes.

To the east, nonnative quagga mussel -- the zebra mussel's bigger, tougher cousin -- may be partly to blame for turning part of Lake Erie into an oxygen-starved dead zone.

At a binational conference of Great Lakes experts in Ann Arbor that concluded Saturday, the region's foremost invasive species gurus admitted the threats are moving faster than science can keep up with them.

"I ask the question: 'Do we know what's happening in the Great Lakes?' and generally the answer is no," said John Mills, director of the Ontario region for Environment Canada. The influx of foreign species -- often dumped from the ballast water of ocean-going tankers -- is turning the Great Lakes into an ecological carnival ride where biologists can only guess what will happen next.

In Michigan, the only state or province entirely within the Great Lakes watershed, the stakes are enormous. Changes in the lakes can have an immediate impact on anglers, swimmers, waterfront property owners and businesses. Ripple effects spread through the state's tourist economy.

Managing the invasive species threat and a host of other Great Lakes-related issues were part of the agenda at the three-day meeting of the International Joint Commission. The IJC oversees management of boundary waters between the

[Home page](#)

[Site index](#)

[View the front page](#)

[Weather](#)

[Lottery](#)

[Comics](#)

[Photos](#)

[Movie listings](#)

[Restaurant guide](#)

[Search](#)

[Archives](#)

[Death notices](#)

[Personals](#)

[Auto news](#)

[Newspaper](#)

[subscriptions](#)

[About the Free](#)

[Press](#)

[Jobs at the Free](#)

[Press](#)

[Bookstore](#)

United States and Canada.

The consensus: Better coordination is needed among the dozens of groups and government agencies tasked with safeguarding the lakes.

One idea: A Great Lakes czar to spearhead such efforts.

"On the invasive species, there is a real need for someone to take control," said Thomas Skinner, administrator for the federal Environmental Protection Agency's region that includes the Great Lakes states.

The IJC has already asked U.S. and Canadian federal governments for authority to coordinate the war on invasives, but has not yet been granted that power, said Dennis Schornack of Williamston, chairman of the U.S. Section of the commission.

"I don't disagree. I think someone should be put in charge to encourage enforcement and look for common standards," he said.

More than 160 nonnative species have been discovered in the lakes -- ranging from microscopic invaders to the ubiquitous zebra and quagga mussels.

The mussels, whose excrement increases phosphorus levels that lead to damaging algae blooms, may be to blame for a dead zone in Lake Erie where almost nothing lives.

The dead zone is a nightmarish setback to the lake, which was the poster child for pollution during the 1960s when pollution on a tributary caught fire and Time magazine declared it a dead lake.

Exhaustive efforts slashed phosphorus levels through the 1970s and 1980s. In 1995, the phosphorus levels began increasing. The mussels and farmland runoff may be responsible, said Jeff Reutter, a researcher at Ohio State University.

Because Lake Erie is the shallowest of the Great Lakes, it often is the harbinger of bad news.

"It's the sentinel for all the Great Lakes. If there's going to be a problem, it'll probably show up first" in Lake Erie, Reutter said.

Contact HUGH MCDIARMID JR. at 248-586-2611.

 
email this | print this

Related stories >

Threats to lakes grow faster than cures

- [Schools sued over same-sex benefits](#)
- [MICHIGAN NEWS BRIEFS: Lansing -- Top justices propose changes to state courts](#)



[Search Used Cars](#)

Thousands for sale,
updated daily.

[Search New Cars](#)

Get a price quote from a
dealer near you.

[Sell Your Car](#)

Tell us about your car
and we'll do the rest.

[Home](#)

[News](#)

[Sports](#)

[Entertainment](#)

[Business](#)

[Features](#)

[Opinion](#)

[Tech](#)

[Marketplace](#)

>KNIGHT RIDDER>

INFORMATION FOR LIFE

Copyright © 2003 Detroit Free Press Inc. All rights reserved.